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To: Judiciary and Human Services Committee

From: Michele Waldner
New Horizons

Date: March 15, 2010

RE: Raised Bill 5497: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence.

Good morning, Senator McDonald, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, Representative Lawlor and members of the Human Services and Judiciary Committees. My name is Michelle Waldner and I am the Director of New Horizons, a program of Community Health Center and the domestic violence program in Middletown. I am here today to talk about Section Two of Raised Bill 5497: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence.

In this Section, it is proposed that anyone who has been charged with violation of an order of protection and who has been determined to be high risk be subject to electronic monitoring. In my support of this proposal, I would like to refer to the recent death of Chester resident, Bonnie MacKay Belanger.

According to all reporting, Bonnie MacKay Belanger did everything right. She filed for divorce, sought the protection of the court and received a protective order. She called the police when her husband came to the door in violation of the protective order. And today, she is dead.

I know electronic monitoring is just an additional tool that may help a victim to be safe. But, it appears that if Ms. Belanger's husband had been subject to electronic monitoring, she may have been alive today. She would have had ample notification that he was in the area, and the police would have been waiting at the house for him. Instead, he was already breaking into the house when Ms. Belanger called the police.

Bonnie MacKay Belanger is not the only victim who could have or will benefit from electronic monitoring. When any domestic violence offender is electronically monitored, they would have to stop and think about how to proceed when someone knows their whereabouts and every movement. It just might be the one thing that stops them from committing further acts of violence.

I thank you for listening to my request and I hope that you will support this bill.